

Letter to the Editor by Jesse Smith

Beaver Dam Township  
April 20, 1882

“Past and Present Fifty-five Years Ago and Today”

Mr. Editor: Thinking that it might prove interesting to your reader, I have concluded to give you a short sketch of the habits and conditions of the people of Beaver Dam township since my recollection, fifty-five years ago, and up to this time.

There were 38 families living inside the present boundaries of Beaver Dam township. This does not include the Negroes, of whom there were few at that time. The township was thinly settled by a healthy, hardy and industrious people, its forest abounding in the masts and game, its water with fish, snakes, bull frogs and turtles. Of the 38 families, 24 lived in log houses and cabins, 12 in small buildings, and 2 families, Archibald Adams and Benjamine Briley, lived in two-story frame buildings. Only two of all these buildings were plastered, and the comforts of modern times were scarcely heard of. But, the embarrassments of today were not heard of either. The people were not rich, yet they were independent of want or care. They raised corn a plenty for the bread and meat, tar and turpentine for their pocket change. They wove their own cloth, which was made from the little patches of cotton cultivated for that purpose. This cotton was picked with the fingers instead of the steam power gins of the present period (1882). It used to form one of the chief amusements for the young people to meet at a neighbor's house and have a cotton picking. Each one had a task weighed out to pick that night, and in this way they would go through the neighborhood. After the tasks were ended, then fun began by promenading, flirting, (or courting as they called it in this good old times) and afterwards they would play “Old String Beans and Barley Grows,” or “Old Sister Pharby,” which were always concluded by those sweet solutions that I have no doubt, you, Mr. Editor, would like even at this day, and, no doubt, get on very rare occasions. Then would follow “Selling the Thimble,” when the whole party would guess who had it. All who guessed wrong had a pawn to play, these consisted of snuff boxes, tooth brushes, pen knives and combs. After this a lady and gentleman were selected to sit as a court and impose the fines and penalties for errors made in guessing for the thimbles. The punishment was not very grievous, for each would share half the penalty with the other, thus it was a pleasant occupation. I reckon your readers can guess what it was. The men would amuse themselves in the fall and winter by shooting matches for beeves and lambs. Sometimes this would extend far into the night, and frequently when a most too liberal use of “apple jack” had been furnished and imbibed, differences would arise, which were always settled by striking a ring and the two combatants walking into it. Then one would say, “The law is clear,” (The effect of this was to clear them from any